

Lansing Playgrounds

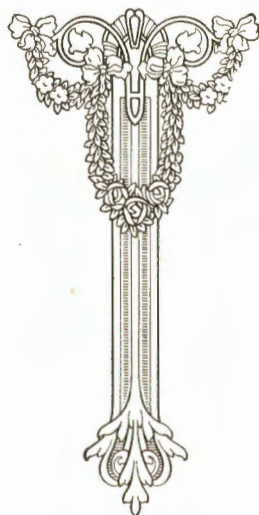
A REPORT
COVERING THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE
LANSING PLAYGROUND ASSOCIATION
FOR THE YEARS OF
1912, 1913, 1914 AND 1915, WITH DETAILED REPORTS
FOR THE YEARS 1914 AND 1915

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1914, 1915



Lansing, Michigan
November, 1915

Lansing Playground Association

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AUGUST SCHLACK



Introduction

SINCE the work of the Lansing Play Grounds is now being supported by public funds, it has seemed proper to give a brief accounting of this work to the citizens of Lansing. The people of Lansing have a right to the knowledge of how their institutions are managed. It is the hope of the Lansing Playground Association that this report will not only serve this function but that it will also enlighten many regarding the real purpose of public playgrounds, the manner of conducting playgrounds, and the results achieved.

With these purposes in mind, the Lansing Playground Association hereby presents to the people of the City of Lansing a summary of its activities covering the last four years.



—Photo by Linn



Resume

On the afternoon of October 6, 1911, a group of interested citizens met in the High School building to discuss ways and means of providing Public Playgrounds for Lansing. From this meeting a committee was appointed to draft suitable By-laws and an adjournment was taken until October 17, 1911. At this adjourned meeting By-laws as presented were adopted and officers and an executive committee of the Lansing Playground Association were elected.

The first municipal playgrounds of America were provided by the City of Boston in the summer of 1885. At the time Lansing first considered playgrounds from a municipal stand point, there were 600 cities out of about 1000 cities in the United States having a population of 5000 or over with municipal playgrounds. The nearly all of these cities had known only success in their playground activities, the newly elected Lansing Playground Association committee decided that it would ask for no municipal financial support until playgrounds in Lansing had proved a success. Through the generosity of a few Lansing citizens who gave from \$1.00 to \$10.00 each, a budget of \$650.00 was raised and two playgrounds were maintained during the month of July and August 1912—one at the East Side Park and the other at the Kalamazoo Street School grounds. So successful was the playground work that summer that the City Council and the Park Board have supported the work financially each year since—allowing the committee full authority in the matter of spending all money appropriated, employing supervisors, directing the work, etc.



—Photo by Linn



The attendance for the first year tho not so large as the years following, was very satisfactory, being close to 20000. Parents frequently did not understand that paid supervisors were constantly on the grounds during playground hours and that their children were safer on these playgrounds than any where else when actually away from home. Gradually, however, this handicap has been overcome and today Public Playgrounds have no more loyal supporters than the mothers of the children who are regular attendants of the playgrounds.

Why Have Public Playgrounds

The fundamental reason for public playgrounds, is that the child must have play. All parents know this, as do all who have any intimate association with children. So important is the play side of a child's life that the schools require a certain amount of wholesome outdoor play each morning and each afternoon every day of the school year. If it is true then, that the child must play, it is equally true that the community in which that child lives must give him a place to play, a place where his moral as well as his physical welfare is secure. This can be done on a supervised playground. The word supervisor often leads to misunderstanding. The child on a supervised playground plays just what he most wishes to play—the main purpose of the supervisor being to stimulate interest when the child needs to be interested and to be on hand as the protector of all the children.

Formation Better than Reformation

On the public playground there are no bad boys, neither are there any bad girls, using the word "bad" in its common interpretation. Boys are very much as their environment, and will respond as readily to suggestions of the right kind as they will to wrong influences. A boy is simply so much energy and his life is good or bad as that energy may be employed. The same conditions apply to girls; there is no difference. One of the great weaknesses in men and women is that while they are willing to cure they often are quite indifferent about creating causes to prevent. If we would spend the same money and the same energy on our children that we do on our criminals, we would actually save money besides having kept as good citizens thousands upon thousands who, because of community neglect, have committed crime.

During the summer months when children feel the need of exercise and play more than any time during the year and when



their energies need direction because of no definite occupation, the need of the public playground is the greatest, and the responsibility of the community very great. Childrens' petty offenses and even juvenile crime are the result of community neglect in most cases. The experiment has been made of taking account of the juvenile cases before and after supervised playgrounds were established. Always the public playground lessens the number of offenses committed; often it eliminates entirely these offenses. Please remember that your boy and your girl are in as great danger as is any boy or girl who must find his or her places under chance conditions.

The public playground knows no classes—one boy is as good as another and no boy is better than another. Absolute democracy prevails at all times, and genuine democracy is lived and believed.

Community Responsibility

For three years Lansing has maintained three public playgrounds during the months of July and August, but as provided, we have no playgrounds which are attractive to the older girls and the older boys. Boys between 14 and 18 years of age will get exercise—on their High School teams, delivering papers, or on the streets. Girls between 14 and 18 years of age get far too little exercise. Girls between these ages will not play on the streets and they should not do so. These girls are entitled to a proper place to play—a playground where they may develop their bodies so that they may acquire the necessary strength for their lives' tasks. It is the public responsibility to provide such grounds. Communities are taxed for many things, and a large part of our taxes go for property and for the protection of property. Too often it is the case that whatever is left of the city's budget (if the amount left is very small) goes for the benefit of the children. Gradually people are learning that their



—Photo by Linn



children are important—possibly more important than jails and public buildings.

Future Needs

A city the size of Lansing should have not less than five public playgrounds with spaces reserved for future use. These grounds should be equipped with swimming pools, wading pools, and all of the games and apparatus that children require for their physical welfare and happiness. Each ground should be large enough to give separate space for the older girls and a separate space for the older boys. The grounds should be laid out by a competent landscape architect. Places of shelter, drinking fountains, and toilets should be provided and the same care and thought should be exercised as in the case of any other great public utility. Finally these same play spaces should be utilized in the evening by the men and women of the community, who need wholesome recreation and often have no opportunity to secure it.

Speaking from a purely local standpoint, Lansing has one playground which is exceptionally well adapted for such work, namely, Oak Park. Moores Park will undoubtedly prove to be more popular in the future. Contemplated improvements from the playground standpoint will make it an ideal recreation spot as well as rest place and picnic ground.

It has proved difficult in the past to provide adequate skating grounds—a crying need in winter to keep the children off the dangerous ice in the river.

At present the Lansing playgrounds need better facilities for swimming, baseball, and tennis. In order to carry out a complete program of playground work commensurate with the needs, the size, and the growth of the city of Lansing, it will undoubtedly be necessary to provide larger funds in the future.

What we need from the city, however, is a broader viewpoint and an adequate appropriation of both ground and money so that the children and the community may have greater enjoyment, greater safety and greater health. These conditions will be brought about in time. That this pamphlet may hasten that time, is our wish.

Appreciation

The Lansing Playground Association has undertaken three different winters to have skating rinks, and one summer it supervised three vacant lot gardens, also the past two seasons, it has provided the municipal Christmas tree. In all of its work it has received the hearty co-operation of the School Board and in much of its work it has received cordial and active support from the



different departments of the city; especially from the Fire Department, the Public Works Department, and the Water and Electric Light Department. The Association also owes much to some of our civic organizations and school teachers, who made possible the splendid pageant on Children's Day of Home Coming Week. In fact, the response of all individuals and city industries has been more than generous whenever the Association has made an appeal. The last season, when the city was short of funds and the appropriation for playgrounds was very small, a circular letter sent to a few men brought in sufficient further funds to take care of the balance needed. This response was especially gratifying. It was the best evidence to the committee that public playgrounds are indeed appreciated in Lansing.

In this connection it seems appropriate to pay tribute to the supervisors and their assistants who have placed the Lansing Playgrounds on a highly efficient basis. Mr. Edward N. DeWitt, for the past three years supervisor of the Lansing playgrounds, deserves an especial commendation. He has brought to this work a constructive, scientific, and professional service which can scarcely be overestimated. Himself a natural leader, he has impressed upon his assistants a fine spirit of zeal and co-operation, and wholesome leadership. Under his guidance the directors have won the confidence and the appreciation of the Playground Association as well as the public at large.



—Photo by Linn

Attendance

There are several methods of judging the efficiency of any public service. Perhaps the safest method of determining the influence of the playground movement is to ascertain how many children it has succeeded in reaching. There are no accurate records for the first two years of playground work in Lansing. Detailed records of the attendance for the seasons of 1914 and 1915 were kept and are given below.

1914

Play Grounds	1st Week		2nd Week		3rd Week		4th Week		5th Week		6th Week		7th Week		8th Week		9th Week		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
East Park	514	630	1313	1547	1018	1138	1478	1723	1400	1700	1376	1476	1208	1126	1768	1652	1496	1847	24,410
Kalamazoo	219	222	741	469	659	363	460	366	475	425	463	372	348	201	341	286	385	493	7,673
Moore's Park	75	197	496	474	478	301	570	411	700	585	590	728	306	195	347	329	356	257	6,935
Total for Week	1782		5040		3957		5008		5285		5005		3384		4773		4834		39,018

1915

Play Grounds	1st Week		2nd Week		3rd Week		4th Week		5th Week		6th Week		7th Week		8th Week		9th Week		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
East Park	841	704	1941	1295	2028	1531	1348	1947	2190	1678	922	1182	2103	1981	1637	2552	1011	3310	30,201
Kalamazoo	275	263	518	450	573	440	463	453	592	450	648	494	647	530	620	424	496	436	8,772
Moore's Park	135	134	310	290	438	366	361	214	446	435	332	200	400	361	545	276	411	509	6,163
Reo Park					4960		1120		1394		450		615		300		186		9,025
Total for Week	2352		4804		10336		5906		7185		4928		6637		6354		6359		54,161



EDWARD N. DEWITT
Supervisor of Lansing Playgrounds
1913, 1914 and 1915



Apparatus

Although proper supervision is by far the most important phase of playground work, it is essential to provide playgrounds with certain forms of apparatus. The following lists of apparatus will indicate what has been available in the way of playground facilities on the Lansing playgrounds:

Apparatus Belonging To East Side Park

3 Small Swings	2 1 in. x 50 ft. Rope
2 Hanging Teeter Ladders	2 Ladders
2 Basket Ball Goals	1 Spring Board
2 Basket Ball Goal Posts	2 Tennis Balls, (new)
1 Basket Ball Goal Background	1 Sprinkling Can
4 Tether Ball Posts	2 Complete Croquet Sets (6)
2 Tennis Ball Posts	1 Tape Line 50 ft.
4 Base Ball Bats	1 Score Board
8 Horse Shoes	600 ft. of $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. Rope
2 Basket Balls	1 May Pole
6 Indoor Base Balls	2 Quoits Stakes
5 Tennis Rackets (new)	1 Slide (12 pieces)
4 Tether Balls and Nets	1 Whistle

Apparatus Belonging To Kalamazoo Play Ground

6 Tennis Rackets (new)	1 Rope 1 in. x 30 ft.
2 Tennis Nets	2 Play Ground Balls
2 Basket Balls	2 Basket Ball Standards
2 Croquet Sets (6)	2 Basket Ball Goals
4 Prs. of Horse Shoes	1 Slide (7 pieces)
2 Quoits Stakes	1 Sea-Saw
2 Teeter Ladders	3 Small Swings
4 Play Ground Balls	2 Golf Clubs
3 Base Balls	

Apparatus Belonging To Moores Park Play Ground

2 Teeter Ladders	8 Horse Shoes
2 Newcomb Posts	4 2 in. x 12 in. x 16 in. boards for Sand Box
2 Basket Ball Posts with Backboards	1 Newcomb Rope 30 ft.
2 Baskets	4 Indoor Base Balls
2 Tether Ball Poles	2 Ball Bats
1 Long Rope for Swing 50 ft.	4 Tennis Rackets
2 Jumping Standards	2 Tether Ball Rope and Net
2 Complete Croquet Sets	1 Golf Club
1 Base Ball Mask	



Games—Taught and Played

Each playground has its distinctive needs and received distinctive management. A *general* program of games has been followed however, which could be shifted to meet demands.

At the weekly meetings of the directors a program was outlined, by the supervisor, for each day. New games, rules and cautions, were explained. This course of instruction covered—

Singing games—Suitable for small children.

Group games—Ring games, races, games of tag, games of ball.

Competitive games for boys.

Competitive games for girls.

Folk Dancing—Characteristic dances of different nations adapted to playground use.

Story telling—The proper selection and interpretation of stories.

The following is a list of games taught and played on all the grounds.

Games for Small Children

Drop the handkerchief
Snatch the handkerchief
Snatch the club
Common tag
Wood, iron, stone, tag.
Poison tag
Whip tag
Circle ball

Maze tag
Link tag
Pass ball games
Straddle ball
Arch ball
Bound ball
Snake ball
Center ball

Games for Very Small Children

Sand box games with shovels, rakes and pails
Paper dolls
Swings



—Photo by Linn



Singing Games

Itiskit Itasket
London Bridge
Did you ever see a Lassie

King of France
Nuts in May
Mulberry Bush

Songs

Bah, Bah, Black Sheep
The Crooked Man
Hickory, Dickory Dock
Lullaby
Bean Porridge Hot
Simple Simon

Little Boy Blue
There was an old Woman
Queen of Hearts
Jack be Nimble
Jack and Jill
The Clouds

Games for More Advanced Children

Playground ball
Base ball
Basket ball
Volley ball
Tether ball
Mount ball
Rider ball
Slag ball
German bat ball
Drive the peg
Man over board
Prisoners base
Ham, ham, Chicken, ham, bacon
Lame Goose
Human race
Wheel barrow race
Hopping race

Knee ball
Dodge ball
Three deep
Newcomb
Tennis
Wrestling line
Chase the beetle
All run
Spud
Relay races
Sack race
Three-legged race
Tug-of-war
Bicycle polo
Clock golf
Quoits
Stride vault



—Photo by Linn



The girls enjoyed most of the active games and in addition were interested in drills, sewing, crocheting, making of paper dolls, singing folk songs, and dancing folk dances.

At Kalamazoo play grounds a kite club had many enthusiastic members.

At East Park the younger boys organized a sail boat club. There were forty members. Each boy was obliged to make a sail boat of his own and sail it at least three times a week to retain membership.

Athletic Contests and Competitive Games

The team work instinct is a force which begins to develop in the average boy or girl at about the twelfth year. It is of incalculable educational value and is fostered and utilized upon the play ground.

A series of athletic contests and competitive games has been held each year, culminating in the annual play festival which is given at the close of the season. A typical program of events is as follows:

Events for Boys

Athletic contests—Chinning the bar, standing broad jump, 50 yard dash, playground ball throwing, sack race, relay race, potato race, and giant stride vault.

Games—Basket ball, volley ball, clock Golf.

Events for Girls

Tether ball, 40 yard race, potato race, drills, and folk dances. Prizes were awarded to the winners of the first, second, third, and fourth places, respectfully, in the finals.

Discipline

A most important advance has been the development of self government on the playgrounds. At the beginning of the past season, the supervisor inaugurated the "honor system." It was his excellent idea that by placing a certain amount of responsibility upon the children he would be putting into practice the ideals of good citizenship. Each child kept a daily record with the director. Credits were given for good conduct, obedience, helpfulness in caring for apparatus and grounds, and for games played, field entries made, and extra credits for games and events won. Inversely credits were forfeited for misconduct, disobedience, etc. The children showed a splendid spirit of co-operation and friendly rivalry. They loved to help. They learned to play a certain game at a certain time, to be punctual, to appoint their own leaders and captains, to undertake the punishment of offenders.

Occasionally a child was suspended. This had the desired effect—an early return of the transgressor with a plea for forgiveness and a promise of future conduct.



Swimming

One of the most enjoyable and health-giving recreations for children is bathing, especially open-air swimming. During the past season the Playground Association extended its activities to include the supervision of a part of Reo Park. At that point the river has been cleaned, the ground leveled, diving boards, rafts, and inclined poles constructed by the Reo Motor Car Co. A special place was set aside and roped in, for the use of the boys. The Playground Association supplied a director who was in charge each day, except Sunday, from 10 a. m. until 4 p. m. and from 6 to 7 evenings. Special hours were given, each morning and afternoon to swimming lessons.

Ninety-two boys, who could not swim, registered at the beginning of the season. 52 of these learned to swim before its close and perhaps ten more to the extent of self preservation.



-Photo by Linn



At Oak Park swimming has been an attractive feature for two seasons. Boys and girls participating on alternate days.

Notwithstanding the fact that the accommodations there were meager, the dressing tent scarcely deserving the name, being a strip of canvas stretched around four poles—the discipline was excellent and the enthusiasm ran high. An average of 150 boys and 100 girls were at the pool on swimming days. Instruction in diving, floating, and the various swimming strokes were given. About 60 boys and 70 girls learned to swim during the past season.



—Photo by Linn



Financial Statement

Perhaps the greatest obstacle in the way of efficient playgrounds is the matter of securing sufficient and permanent funds. Fortunately the public has come to recognise the importance of organized play during the summer months and we may hope for less objection from the financial standpoint. There is, however, in the minds of some people a little doubt regarding the advisability of using so large a portion of the finances for supervision. This doubt is also being gradually dispelled, for we are beginning to learn that merely providing a place to play and the things to play with has never yet made better boys and girls. A bare piece of land with an efficient and well-paid director is worth infinitely more to the community than the most expensive equipment conceivable. The tendency is in the direction of securing well-trained supervision, and we may look for a still larger percentage of the funds to be used in this direction.

During the summer of 1914 the total attendance on the Lansing playgrounds was 39,018.

During the summer of 1915 the total attendance on the Lansing playgrounds was 54,161.

During each summer the playgrounds were open for 52 days, 104 days of supervised play for 93,630 children at a cost of \$1718.89. The cost of two summers of organized play for each child was less than two cents. Would you be willing to give a postage stamp to provide wholesome recreation for a child for two summers?

During the year of 1912 the work of the playground was financed by contributions from private individuals. In 1914 the Board of Park and Cemetery Commissioners recommended an appropriation of one thousand dollars for playground work and the City Council made the appropriation. In 1915 the same amount was asked for, but due to unusual demands made upon the city budget this amount was not appropriated. However, the city did furnish \$400 for playground work and the remainder was solicited from citizens.

The following is a statement of the receipts and expenditures of the Lansing Playground Association during the term of its existence.



1912

RECEIPTS

Solicited from members of the Playground Association,
sustaining members and other citizens\$650.00

EXPENSES

Supervision\$382.99
Equipment, drayage, etc.87.09
Printing and miscellaneous28.74
Total expenses\$649.14
Balance an hand86

1913

RECEIPTS

Balance on hand\$.86
City vouchers848.41
Prize money donated28.00
Total receipts\$877.27

EXPENSES

Supervision\$668.29
Equipment, drayage, etc166.67
Printing and Miscellaneous19.25
Total expenses\$854.21
Balance on hand23.06

1914

RECEIPTS

Balance on hand\$ 23.06
City vouchers867.56
Total receipts\$890.62

EXPENSES

Supervision\$658.05
Equipment, drayage, etc232.57
Total expenses\$890.62

1915

RECEIPTS

City vouchers\$517.79
Private subscriptions310.50
Christmas tree fund11.15
Total receipts\$839.44

EXPENSES

Supervision\$665.86
Equipment, drayage, etc162.41
Total expenses\$828.27
Balance on hand\$ 11.17



Subscribers

As is the case with all new enterprises, it has been necessary for some individuals to render financial and moral support to the Lansing Playground Association. A list of such subscribers is hereby added to this report.

H. F. Harper	R. W. Morse	Jno. McClellan
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Wm. Donavan	J. A. Weston	Etta Manne
Wm. C. Anderson	Christian Breisch	E. C. Lindemann



Lansing Newspaper Editorials

"Hundreds of children have been made happier because of the playground work. Healthful amusements under the direction of trained supervisors, together with instructions along lines which cannot but make far better citizens, has been returned for money expended."

"The more money we use on public playgrounds the less will be spent on reformatories and penitentiaries. Nine-tenths of the boys in the Michigan Reform School would not be there if they had been given the consideration accorded Lansing children."

"Those who have been interested in the cause of public playgrounds cannot but feel that their faith is the cause for which they have worked so earnestly has been justified and that public appropriations for playgrounds should not be accepted without question."

"It is unnecessary to speak of the great good which has been done to hundreds of children who have found healthful recreation under the best influences."

"We have the concrete fact that the public playground is becoming more and more popular in Lansing."



—Photo by Linn

THE RIPLEY & GRAY PRINTING CO.
LANSING, MICHIGAN